

## ***Helabojun*- A successful model of agri-food business in Sri Lanka**

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A program was initiated 10 years back by the Women's Agriculture Extension (WAE Unit) of the Department of Agriculture (DOA) as micro/small-scale road side food stalls for traditional foods. Later in 2012 this was developed into a mini food court known as *Helabojun*. The objectives of the center are: to popularize and sustain the 'True Sri Lankan taste', to provide nutritious and healthy food at a reasonable price to people; also contributing entrepreneurship development and to improve the income of low income families. Initially 30 women were employed at the 1<sup>st</sup> outlet at Gannoruwa in 2012 and expanded to 14 *Helabojun* centers throughout the country with 500 women today. The Ministry of Agriculture funded the expansion of this program. Buildings and some utensils were provided by the DOA and women have to purchase other essential cooking utensils with the assistance of bank loans if necessary. Initially women were trained on food preparation, hygienic practices, customer care and financial management. The food is prepared using raw materials procured by them and served warm at the food courts. Currently, more than 90 different food products are sold. The daily income of the entrepreneurs ranges from SLR 2000-6000 rupees. This concept was effective and positively influenced customer attraction. Monitoring is done by the WAE. *Helabojun* outlets are becoming more and more popular among locals and tourists. This concept also helps to preserve the traditional Sri Lankan food culture and increase dietary diversity to provide nutritious foods for the people.

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